

New silver half makes its bow

By Roger Boye

After a lapse of nearly 30 years, government workers once again are churning out special commemorative half dollars made with silver.

Production of the new coins, which honor the 250th anniversary of George Washington's birth, began earlier this month during ceremonies in Denver and San Francisco. Since then, collectors have ordered thousands of the pieces despite hefty prices.

Uncle Sam is charging \$8.50 for each uncirculated coin and \$10.50 for a proof specimen. Commemorative halves are "legal tender" for 50 cents, but the coins are made primarily for sale to collectors, not for circulation.

Demand so far is brisk, in part because each piece contains more than one-third of an ounce of silver. The coins are identical in size and metal mixture [90 percent silver, 10 percent copper] to half dollars made for circulation before 1965.

Nevertheless, experts caution hobbyists not to expect windfall profits when reselling their keepsakes. Government machines could produce as many as 10 million of the 1982-dated coins before the end of next year, more than enough to satisfy collector demand into the 21st Century.

In view of current metal prices, the coins are no great bargain, either. For example, the price of silver would have to quadruple before the



The heads side of the Washington half dollar.

metal in each uncirculated piece is worth the \$8.50 sale price.

Some pros are impressed with the coin's heads-side design created by Elizabeth Jones, the first woman to serve as the mint's chief sculptor and engraver. The obverse shows Washington astride a horse; the tails side depicts the eastern facade of Mt. Vernon.

To order, send a check or money order to Bureau of the Mint, 55 Mint St., San Francisco, Calif. 94175. Orders for proof and uncirculated coins should be mailed in separate envelopes, with a limit of 25 coins per order.

U.S. Mint officials say to allow several months for delivery. Workers make proof commemoratives in San Francisco ["S" mint mark] and uncirculated pieces in Denver ["D" mint mark].